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ABSTRACT

Examined were differences in the amount of affectionate behavior early childhood teachers expressed to (1) individual children and groups of children, and (2) female and male children. Data were collected through naturalistic observations of 47 female teachers in six day care centers. Teachers' affectionate behaviors and the types of recipients were recorded. Teacher behaviors observed were: smiling, use of affectionate words, active affectionate physical contact (hugging, tickling), and passive affectionate physical contact (holding hands, holding child on lap). The data were converted to percentages and subjected to parametric multivariate analyses of variance. The female teachers were found to express more affection to female children than to male children and more affection to individual children than to groups of children. Implications for teacher training and early childhood programs are discussed. A six-page reference list is attached. (Author/RH)

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Early Childhood Teachers' Affectionate Behavior: Differential Expression to Female Children, Male Children, and Groups of Children*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine differences in (a) the amount of affectionate behavior early childhood teachers expressed to individual vs. groups of children and (b) the amount of affection teachers expressed to female and male children. Data were collected by conducting naturalistic observations of 47 female teachers in six day care centers. Teachers' affectionate behavior and the types of recipients were recorded. The behaviors observed were smiling, affectionate words, active affectionate physical contact, and passive affectionate physical contact. The data were converted to percentages and subjected to parametric multivariate analyses of variance. The female teachers were found to express more affection to female chldren than to male children and more affection to individual children than to groups of children. Implications for teacher training and early childhood programs are discussed.

Affection has been defined as "close, personal emotional feelings between two people (Schutz, 1979, p. 94). The importance of affection in human development has been documented extensively in the parent-child literature. The open expression of affection by mothers to children has been associated with secure attachment (e.g., Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1971; Clarke-Stewart, 1973), social competence (e.g., Baumrind, 1973; Waters, Wippman, & Sroufe, 1979), altruism (e.g., Hoffman, 1975), self-esteem (e.g., Barber & Thomas, 1986; Coopersmith, 1967), moral development (e.g., Hoffman, 1970), and self-revelation in children (Snoek & Rothblum, 1979).

Over the past several decades, an important change in American family life has been the increasing numbers of mothers with young children who are entering the labor market. As these mothers with young children enter the labor market, there has been an accompanying increase in the number of preschool children entering group care settings (Hofferth, 1979). If these trends continue, as expected, there will be increasing numbers of young children spending a sizeable portion of their day in group care situations where their development will be influenced by early childhood teachers. Early childhood teachers' roles in current day care programming require taking on more of the caretaking and nurturant functions than was true earlier (Almy, 1982).

As Katz (1979) noted, many teachers of young children recognize that they must supply the nurturance and affection children need before instruction can be effective. Early childhood teachers' expressions of affection have been found to be related to desirable child behaviors such as task performance (e.g., Fagot, 1973; Larsen, 1975) and constructiveness in play (e.g., Muste & Sharpe, 1947). But, we know very little about the naturalisitic social contexts in which teachers express affection. This information would be helpful in designing interventions to encourage teachers' expressions of affection to young children. The purpose of the present study was to begin to describe teachers' expressions of affection to preschool children in day care settings.

According to Schutz's framework for describing the development of social relationships, affectionate reltionships are possible only if one first feels included (recognized and accepted) and in control (competent and respected) in relationships with others. The final stage in the development of social relationships is characterized by the need to feel loved and to develop emotional ties with others. These social relationships include the giving and receiving of affection. Affection is the feeling one has for another whom one perceives as a source of support, encouragement, and/or physical contact (Smith, 1982). The

intent of the giver of the affectionate behavior is to convey to the recipient that she/he is accepted, valued, and worthy (Ausubel, 1980). In interpersonal relationships, affection is related to how emotionally close or distant the relationship becomes. Schutz (1979) has theorized that while both inclusion and control needs can be met in either dyadic or group contexts, affection needs can be met only within a dyadic interaction.

If Schutz is correct, teachers would need to express affection more often to individual children than to groups of children if children's needs for affection are to be met. Of concern is the observation that one possible area of difference between the home and day care environment is the nature and focus of interpersonal relationships. Whereas interpersonal relationships are particularistic in the home environment, they are more universalistic in the day care environment (Powell, 1978). Since most early childhood programs include many group activities, teachers may not have as many opportunities to interact individually with children as they do groups of children. Thus, one factor that may influence teachers' expression of affection is the availability of and use of an appropriate interpersonal context. The first question addressed by this study was

whether the day care environment allowed teachers the opportunity to express more affection to individual children than to groups of children.

Since the day care enviornment may be more universalistic than the home environment, teachers may use more universal organizing strategies such as gender labels and gender-role expectations to organize their behavior (Katz, 1979). Thus, children's gender may be another factor related to teachers' expressions of affection.

There is considerable evidence that male and female adults, both parents and nonparents, use the masculine and feminine gender-role stereotypes as guides for their own behavior when interacting with infants and children and their expectations for appropriate child behavior (e.g., Block, 1978; Condry & Condry, 1976; Fagot, 1973; Frisch, 1977; Langlois & Downs, 1980; Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria, 1974; Seavey, Katz, & Zalk, 1975). There is some evidence that male children have been taught by their parents not to express affection (e.g., Block, 1978; Noller, 1978). Although the cultural gender-role stereotypes in this society traditionally have called for the suppression and control of emotions by males and the expression of affection and nurturance by females (Kagan, 1964), our society is becoming less rigid in its orientation toward gender role expectations (Knox, 1985). Specifically, there is mounting evidence that

it is important for both males and females to be able to express affection. The reciprocal expression of affection appears to be an important component of successful parent-child (Maccoby, 1980), marital (Balswick & Peek, 1971; Ladd, 1981; Weeks & Botkin, 1987), and other intimate relationships (Safilios-Rothschild, 1981).

The few researchers who have studied early childhood teachers' affectionate behavior expressed to boys and girls have reported conflicting findings. In response to children's participation in program activities, teachers have been observed to praise and to hug boys more than they do girls. However, no differences were found in teachers' statements of praise and hugs in response to children's solicitations for attention (Serbin, O'Leary, Kent, & Tonick, 1973). Fagot (1973) found no differences in the frequency of teachers' physical affection given to boys and girls. However, children playing alone and children playing in same-gender groups received more physical affection than children playing in mixed-gender groups. Thus, there is some indication that children's gender or gender appropriate behavior influences teachers' expression of affection. The second question addressed by the present study is whether teachers express different amounts of affection to female and male children.

In addition to there being scant data on teachers' affectionate behavior, there has been little consistency in the conceptualization and operationalization of the construct making it difficult to draw conclusions and formulate implications for teachers. Some of the definitions used were quite global, e.g., teachers' behaviors that relaxed interpersonal tensions (Reed, 1962), while others were focused on specific behaviors, e.g., physical affection (Fagot, 1973). A review of parents', teachers', and children's affectionate behaviors (Botkin, 1983) revealed that the behaviors selected as components of affection may be grouped into three major categories: facial, verbal, and physical. The present study used a measurement system that included behaviors representative of all three categories of affection.

The overall purpose of this study was to begin to describe early childhood teachers' naturalistic expressions of affection to preschool children in day care programs. The specific objectives were (a) to determine if there was a difference in the amount of affection teachers expressed to individual vs. groups of children and (b) to determine if there was a difference in the amount of affection teachers expressed to female and male children.

Methods

Subjects and Settings

The settings for this study were six day care centers. Five centers were federally funded community day care programs located in low-income housing projects. One center was a university-based program. Each center served approximately 30 children between the ages of 3 and 6 years. All of the centers were well organized with developmentally oriented programs and consistent procedures. Each center had a daily schedule with planned activities for the different activity areas. Teachers were assigned to activity areas of responsibility with children moving individually through activities.

The subjects for this study were 47 female teachers. The number of target children, potential recipients of teachers' affectionate behaviors, was 316 (160 females and 156 males).

All teachers in each program whose primary responsibility was working with children were included as subjects. Each of the teachers in the university-based program had earned at least a bachelor's degree. The teachers in the community-based programs all had completed high school. The teachers ranged in age from 20 to 50 years. The community centers had a racial distribution of

approximately half black and half white; thepopulation of the university-based center was predominately white.

Measurement

Teachers' behaviors were measured by direct observation in the natural setting (See Footnote 1). The measurement system included facial, verbal, and physical forms of affection. The categories of affectionate behavior comprising the construct of affection were smiling, affectionate words, active affectionate physical contact, and passive affectionate physical contact. Smiling was defined as smiling or laughing at or with others except when done to ridicule or make fun of others. Affectionate words were defined as statements of liking, enjoying, complimenting, or praising others. Active affectionate physical contact included behaviors that involved high levels of initiative and ongoing movement such as hugging, tickling, playful wrestling, and bouncing. Passive affectionate physical contact included behaviors that were less active and required lower levels of initiative to maintain, such as holding hands or holding another in one's lap. Passive affectionate physical contact behaviors had to occur for at least 5 consecutive seconds to be recorded; the other categories of affectionate behavior could occur for any portion of the interval.

Each observation of a teacher consisted of nine 10-second intervals. There were three distinct interval sets. During the first 10-second interval set, the teacher was observed for the occurrence of smiling and affectionate words. During the second 10-second interval set, she was observed for active affectionate physical contact and passive affectionate physical contact. During the third 10-second interval set, the teacher was observed for social interaction. (The social interaction behaviors were not reported in this study.) This sequence of three interval sets was repeated two additional times per observation of an individual before moving on to the next subject. Measuring individuals in this manner (i.e., observing for a few distinct behaviors at a time) has been found to result in higher interobserver agreement than observing for large numbers of behaviors at once. The measurement for each interval set included whether or not the target behavior occurred and the recipient of the behavior if it occurred.

The recipients of the teachers' affectionate behavior were recorded as teachers directed their behaviors to children. Behaviors directed by teachers to other teachers were not recorded. If more than one behavior and recipient was observed consecutively during an interval set, all behaviors and recipients were recorded. If an individual's behavior was directed simultaneously to two or more

individuals, the recipient was recorded as group. Thus, the possible types of recipients of teachers' behaviors were male children, female children, and groups.

Validity. The measurement system used for this study had been socially validated previously (Twardosz, Schwartz, Fox, & Cunningham, 1979). Videotapes of caregiver-child interactions in day care settings were made. These videotapes were scored by four pairs of observers who had been trained to use the measurement system behavioral definitions and by 85 community volunteers who rated segments of the tapes as containing "little" to "much" affection. Moderate relationships were found between the community ratings and most of the behaviors, $r(16) = .57$ -.69, $p < .05$. The multiple correlation between the four affectionate behaviors and the community ratings was .85, accounting for 73% of the variance.

Reliability. Interobserver agreement was assessed by having two observers simultaneously, but independently, record the subject`s behavior and the type of recipient. Each primary observer received a reliability check during approximately 25% of his/her observation sessions. Agreement scores were computed using Cohen's Kappa (Hartman, 1977).

The agreement scores for type of recipient are presented in Table 1.

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Procedures

Observations occurred over a 2-year period. The average number of weeks observations occurred in a center was 37. The average number of hours observations occurred per week in each center was three. The average number of observations per teacher was 49. Naturalistic observations were scheduled so that there was a sampling of center activities and routines throughout the morning. However, it was not possible to obtain an equal or proportional number of observations for each routine or center or to ensure that each subject was observed equally across routines.

The observations were conducted by 20 primary observers and 37 reliability observers. Some reliability observers were also primary observers at other centers. All observers were trained to use the measurement system and then practiced in the natural setting. Observers who met criterion levels (80% agreement) were assigned weekly observation schedules. Reliability observations were conducted on each observer approximately twice a month. Retraining was conducted

individually with those observers falling below criterion level (80% agreement scores).

Data Reduction and Analysis

Subjects with fewer than 15 observations were dropped from the sample. The raw data for each subject were converted to percentages. The percentage of intervals in which a behavior (i.e., smiling, affectionate words, and active and passive affectionate physical contact) occurred was computed by dividing the total number of times the behavior actually was observed by the number of times it could have occurred and multiplying by 100.

The data were analyzed using parametric, repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) tests. The repeated measure in these analyses was the type of recipient. If the overall test statistic was found to be significant, follow-up univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted on each dependent variable to determine where the primary contributions to the overall difference lay (Hummel & Sligo, 1971).

A .10 level of significance was used to test the hypotheses. This level of significance was selected because of the exploratory nature of the study. The individual was used as the unit of analysis.

Results

The mean percentages of teachers' affectionate behavior

expressed to male children, female children, and groups are presented in Table 2. As can be seen, teachers expressed

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Insert Table 2 about here

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more smiling than any other affectionate behavior. The large values of the standard deviations relative to these means indicate substantial variability in the amount of affectionate behavior expressed by these teachers.

In order to determine whether there was a difference in the amount of affectionate behavior teachers expressed to male and female children and groups a repeated measures MANOVA test was conducted using these three types of recipients. The test revealed a difference in the amount of affectionate behavior teachers expressed to male children, female children, and groups ($F(8, 50) = 11.92$, $p = .001$). Follow-up repeated measures univariate tests were conducted to determine where the primary contributions to this overall difference lay (see Table 3). These tests indicated that the

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Insert Table 3 about here

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important contributors to the overall difference in teachers' affectionate behavior were affectionate words, active affectionate physical contact, and passive affectionate

physical contact. Smiling was not an important contributor to the overall difference. An examination of the mean percentages of teachers' affectionate behavior expressed to each type of recipient (Table 2) reveals that among those variables contributing to the overall difference, groups of children consistently received less teacher affectionate behavior than individual boys or individual girls.

To determine whether teachers expressed different amounts of affection to boys and girls, a repeated measures MANOVA procedure was conducted using only male and female children as types of recipients. The test revealed that there was a difference in the amount of affectionate behavior teachers expressed to male and female children ($F(4, 54) = 4.73$, $p = .002$). The follow-up repeated measures univariate tests revealed that the dependent variables making important contributions to the overall gender difference in type of recipient of teachers' affectionate behavior were smiling, active affectionate physical contact, and passive affectionate physical contact (see Table 3). Teachers consistently expressed more of the kinds of affectionate behaviors contributing to the overall difference to female children than to male children (see Table 2).

Conclusions and Discussion

Three primary conclusions can be drawn from the results of this study. First, there was substantial variability in

the amount of affection expressed by these teachers. Some teachers were much less affectionate than other teachers. These differences are probably due to (a) individual differences in personality and/or (b) differences in their beliefs about the appropriateness of expressing affection to children. In relation to the latter explanation, some of these teachers may believe that being affectionate with young children is not compatible with a teacher-student relationship. These teachers may believe they would not be able to maintain an authority position or enact disciplinary measures effectively if they were too affectionate with the children.

Secondly, teachers expressed more affection to individual male and female children than to groups of children. This is consistent with Schutz's theory (1979) that affection occurs primarily in dyadic interactions rather than group interactions. The teachers' affectionate behaviors making the primary contributions to this overall difference were affectionate words, active affectionate physical contact, and passive affectionate physical contact. Teachers expressed more of these behaviors to individual male and female children than to groups. The only exception to this pattern was that teachers did not differentiate between individuals and groups in smiling.

Schutz (1979) defined affection as "close, personal, emotional feelings between two people" (p. 94). These data support this definition. Perhaps teachers' lack of differentiation between individuals and groups in smiling indicates that they do not define smiling as being as personally intimate as they do the other categories of affectionate behavior. Smiling may also be more easily expressed to a group than are the other three types of affectionate behavior.

Thirdly, teachers expressed more of their affectionate behavior to female children than to male children. The behaviors that were the primary contirubtors to this difference were smiling, active affectionate physical contact, and passive affectionate physical contact. Teachers expressed more of these behaviors to female children than to male children. This finding is consistent with Perdue and Connor's (1978) report that female teachers touched girls at a higher rate per hour than boys. However, it is inconsistent with the report that teachers praised and hugged boys more than girls in response to children's participation behavior (Serbin et al., 1973). There is obviously a need for further research on the difference in teachers' affectionate behavior to boys and girls.

Teachers did not differentiate in their expression of affectionate words to male and female children. This category of affection included praising. Teachers may not have distinguished between male and female children in their expression of affectionate words because they see it as their responsibility to praise appropriate child behaviors, both for males and females.

If it is the case that teachers express more affection to female children than to male children, girls may be provided with more opportunities to learn about affection as a reciprocal process than boys. Also, girls may be learning to perceive their teachers as sources of support, encouragement, and physical contact, whereas boys may not be. According to Schutz's (1979) theoretical formuations about the role of affection in interpersonal relationships, the issue is how emotionally close or distant the relationship becomes. Boys may be learning to maintain emotional distance in their relationships with opposite-gender individuals. This may explain why boys have been found to restrict their physical affection to same-gender peers while girls do not (Botkin, 1983).

Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice

There is a need to expand theory about and conduct investigations into the role of affection in human

development and relationships. At present, the importance of the role of affection in human development has been limited primarily to theory about the parent-child relationship, especially mother-infant interaction (Ausubel, 1980). There is a need to expand attention to the role of affection beyond the period of infancy and the parent-child relationship. More attention needs to be given to the role of affection in other socializing environments (e.g., early childhood programs) and with nonparental socializing agents (e.g., teachers and peers). For example, what role do affectionate teacher-child relationships play in children's cognitive and emotional development?

At this point in time, there is limited knowledge of the role of affection in human development and relationships beyond the familial context and of the relationship between gender and affectionate behavior. Thus, practical applications of the present findings need to be approached cautiously. But, teacher educators could make use of the present findings in their curricula to foster an awareness of and exploration among teacher trainees of their own attitudes toward affectionate behaviors and gender. In light of the documented importance of affection in early parent-child relationships (Maccoby, 1980), teacher-child relationships (Fagot, 1973; Larsen, 1975; Muste & Sharpe, 1947), marital relationships (Balswick & Peek, 1971; Ladd, 1981; Weeks &

Botkin, 1987), and other intimate relationships (Safilios-Rothschild, 1981), teacher educators and directors of early childhood programs could use the present findings to evaluate the role of the early childhood teacher in using affection as one means of fostering optimum human development and relationships in both boys and girls.

Finally, since teachers expressed more affection to individual children than to groups of children, it is important to allow for one-to-one interactions in early childhood programs. In addition to group activities, the provision of time for spontaneous or structured dyadic interactions might help to foster the expression of affection among teachers and young children.

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Footnotes

The training manual for the affectionate measurement system may be obtained from the first author.

Table 1

Agreement Scores for Type of Recipient of Teachers' Affectionate Behavior

Behavior	Male Children	Female Children	Group
Smiling	.87	.98	.84
Affectionate words	.85	.86	.80
Active Affectionate Physical contact	.92	.86	.67
Passive Affectionate Physical contact	.83	.90	.50

Note: Agreement scores were computed using Cohen's Kappa (Hartman, 1977).

n = 47.

Table 2

Mean Percentages of Teachers' Affectionate Behavior Expressed to Male Children, Female Children, and Groups

Behavior	Type of recipient	M	SD
Smiling	Male children	4.86	4.49
	Female children	6.45	6.45
	Groups	5.80	5.96
Affectionate words	Male children	2.10	2.78
	Female children	2.42	2.70
	Groups	.89	1.79
Active affectionate physical contact	Male children	1.47	1.88
	Female children	2.39	3.00
	Groups	.32	.77
Passive affectionate physical contact	Male children	1.84	2.18
	Female children	3.55	3.73
	Groups	.69	1.24

n = 47

Table 3

Follow-Up Repeated Measures Univariate Tests for Teachers' Affectionate Behavior to the Different Types of Recipients

	Male and female children and group			Male and female children		
Dependent variables	F	df	p	F	df	p
Smiling	1.91	2, 56	.16	3.89	1, 57	.05
Affectionate words	15.21	2, 56	.001	.80	1, 57	.40
Active affectionate physical contact	20.20	2, 56	.001	5.12	1, 57	.03
Passive affectionate physical contact	20.21	2, 56	.001	16.40	1, 57	.001